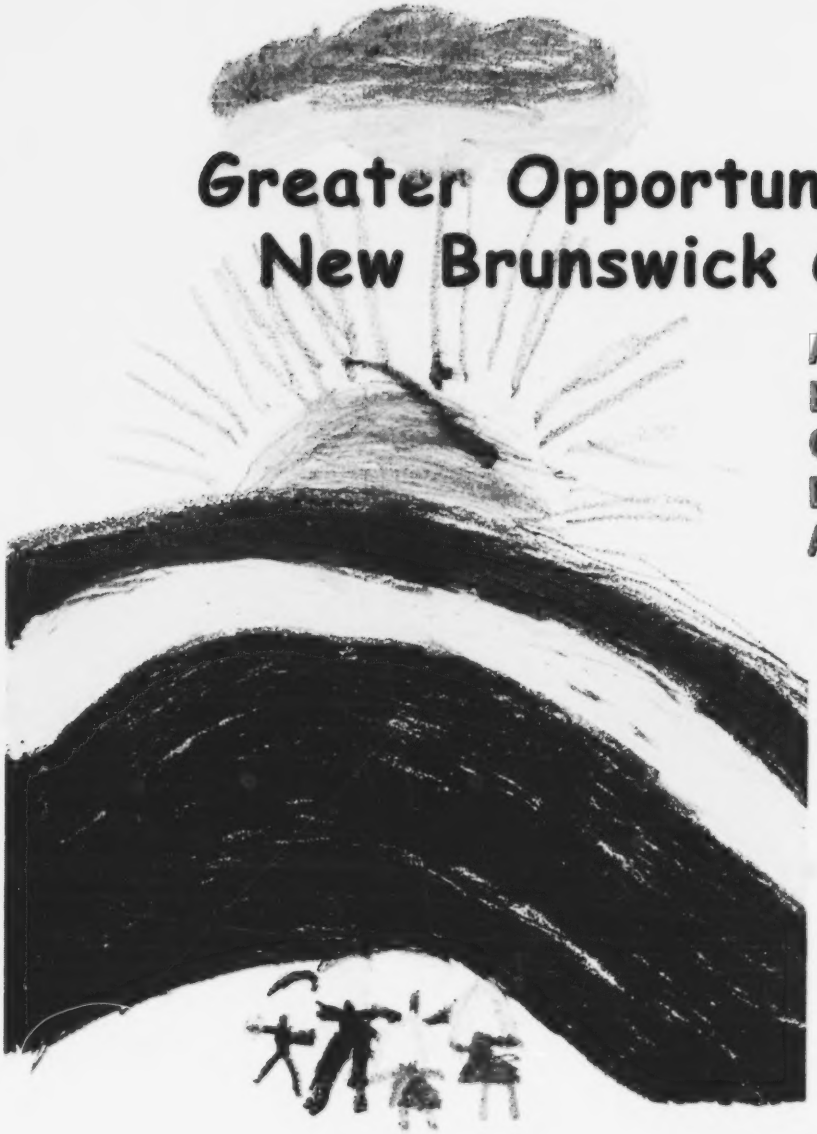
Greater Opportunities For New Brunswick Children:

An Early Childhood Development Agenda



UPDATE

New Nouveau Brunswick
CANADA

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

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Message from the Minister

Greater Opportunities for New Brunswick Children: An Early Childhood Development Agenda is a blueprint for building a more caring and compassionate society.

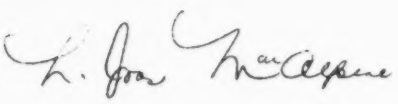
In April, 2001, we announced Phase I (2001-2002) of our Early Childhood Development Agenda. In support of a joint commitment by governments to improve and expand early childhood development programs and services, the federal government provided $7.3 million in Phase I (2001-2002) for early childhood development initiatives and will transfer $9.7 million for Phase II (2002-2003). This federal contribution builds on a solid foundation of over $26 million annually from this provincial government on programs and services supporting early childhood development.

This report identifies the supports for early childhood development that were in place prior to the provision of new federal funding. It includes a progress update on the new initiatives announced in Phase I to assist pregnant women, children under the age of six, and their families; and it describes the enhancement of these initiatives in Phase II.

Many of the initiatives included in our Early Childhood Development Agenda are ground-breaking approaches to enhancing the healthy development of our young children, to supporting parents in their caregiving role, and to strengthening the capacity of communities to support children and families. The *Prenatal Benefit Program*, the *Infant-Parent Attachment Pilot Project*, and the *Early Language Program for Pre-School Children* are examples of innovative early childhood development initiatives that have attracted attention from across the country.

Creating a bright future for our province means we must invest in programs and services to help our children and young people. We know that the skills and abilities of our children and youth are linked to their personal success and to the success of our society. The initiatives included in our Early Childhood Development Agenda demonstrate our commitment to investing in the development of our young children and creating a society in which all children are given the strongest start possible. These strategic investments in children will assist them in reaching their full potential and will contribute to the economic prosperity of New Brunswick.

We will continue to work with the federal government, our provincial and territorial colleagues, and our community partners to improve the well-being of our children and to achieve our vision of creating a more competitive and compassionate society.



Hon. L. Joan Mc Alpine
Minister of Family and Community Services

I. Where We Started

Prior to the launch of our Early Childhood Development Agenda in April, 2001, our ongoing supports for early childhood development amounted to $26.5 million annually.

Day Care Services Program - staffing costs only

The provincial government approves and monitors licensed day care facilities to ensure that all children who attend are safe and receive quality care.

On March 31, 2001, there were 10,258 approved day care spaces in 337 facilities across the province.

Day Care Assistance Program - $7.5 million

Childcare subsidies are available to ensure that low-income families have access to affordable day care. In addition, subsidies are provided to families who require alternate childcare arrangements.

On March 31, 2001, over 2,700 children were benefiting from these programs.

Early Childhood Initiatives (ECI) - $13 million

ECI is a province-wide program to help pregnant women and children under five whose development is at risk. Program components are: prenatal and postnatal screening and intervention; pre-school clinics for 3½ year olds; early intervention services; day care services and home economics services.

On March 31, 2001, over 17,000 pregnant women and children under age five had been assessed by Public Health. Among this group: 2,029 at-risk newborns (29% of all newborns) received services; 1,621 children received early intervention services; and 513 children benefited from integrated day care services.

New Brunswick Child Tax Benefit - $6 million

The provincial government provides an annual benefit of $250 per child to help support children in low-income families. More than 60,000 children, of whom 19,000 are pre-schoolers, receive this benefit.

Other programs serving children of all ages include:

- child protection services;
- adoption services;
- children's residential services;
- community-based services for children with special needs;
- immunization;
- speech language pathology services;
- mental health services; and
- support services to education.

II. Our New Initiatives

New Brunswick's Early Childhood Development Agenda builds on our successes and lays the groundwork for future investments. It is our commitment to ensuring greater opportunities for the young children of New Brunswick.

The new initiatives included in our Early Childhood Development Agenda will:

- improve the quality of early childhood daycare and learning experiences;
- strengthen prenatal care;
- strengthen early language development of young children;
- promote safe environments for children in their homes, their communities, and their natural environments;
- strengthen the capacity of communities to support their families and children;
- support parents in their caregiving role; and
- support parents in giving their children the best possible start in life.

In Phase I (2001-2002) of the New Brunswick Early Childhood Development Agenda, the province received $7.3 million in federal funding for its initiatives for pregnant women, children under the age of six, and their families. In Phase II (2002-2003), the province will receive $9.7 million in federal funding for the continuation and enhancement of these initiatives. The additional $2.4 million in Phase II funding will be directed to the enhancement of: *Enhanced Child Day Care Services; Community Capacity Building for Children and Families; Enhancements to Early Childhood Initiatives Program*; and the *Early Language Program for Pre-School Children.*

Prenatal Benefit Program

The goal of this initiative is to improve the health of low-income pregnant women and their newborns.

The program is a partnership between the Department of Family and Community Services, the Department of Health and Wellness, and key community partners including the VON Healthy Baby & Me Program, and Family Resource Centers.

This program offers financial support and information on healthy food and lifestyle choices to low-income pregnant women throughout the province. Beginning in the fourteenth week of their pregnancy, expectant mothers are eligible to receive up to $81 per month in financial assistance. In addition, Family Resource Centers and outreach sites throughout the province offer information sessions on healthy eating and healthy lifestyle choices during pregnancy.

Phase I (2001-2002):

This program was officially launched on January 17, 2002, although some expectant mothers began to receive financial assistance in November, 2001.

As of March 31, 2002, approximately 650 expectant mothers received financial support under this program.

Promotional materials are available from physicians, pharmacists and various community stakeholders, and a toll free

information line (1-888-987-6789) is in place. Thirteen Family Resource Centers and dozens of outreach sites have begun offering information sessions on *Prenatal Healthy Eating* and *Stop Smoking* programs.

Phase II (2002-2003):

Funding for this initiative will continue. Information sessions will continue to be offered by Family Resource Centers and the program will continue to be promoted at the community level. In addition, initial program evaluation findings will become available.

Enhanced Child Day Care Services

This initiative is comprised of two components designed to improve the quality of childcare services in New Brunswick.

Component One: *Quality Improvement Funding Support Program* is focused on improving service delivery and the quality and availability of infant care. Funding is provided to child day care facilities using prescribed allocation and accountability guidelines, and must be directed to improvement of the quality of childcare services. A minimum of 60% of the funding provided to facilities must be used to improve the working conditions of staff. The remaining funding may be used for the purchase of equipment and materials.

Component Two: *Training Needs Assessment/ Child Day Care Staff Training* is a joint effort of the government and the child care sector to identify the training and professional development needs of those employed in the childcare sector.

Phase I (2001-2002):

Under the *Quality Improvement Funding Support Program,* funding was distributed to child day care facilities throughout the province for improving the quality and availability of childcare services.

On March 31, 2002, there were 11,193 approved day care spaces in 359 facilities across the province. This represents a 9% increase from March 31, 2001 in the number of approved day care spaces.

A training needs assessment has been completed for staff and management of child day care facilities throughout the province. The assessment identified the need for increased access to affordable training and ongoing professional development in early childhood development and childcare.

At the request of the child care sector, two provincial conferences (one in each official language) were funded in an effort to support networking, information-sharing and the establishment of priorities.

Funding was also provided to the New Brunswick Association for Community Living (NBACL) to create a further pilot of the innovative project "Keeping the Door Open". This project is designed to enhance the skills and knowledge of early childhood educators and increase the capacity of child day care facilities to maintain quality environments for all children in their care, with emphasis on children with special needs.

Early Childhood Care and Education New Brunswick/Soins et éducation à la petite enfance du Nouveau-Brunswick received funding for a "Spread the Word, Not the Germ" project. This project incorporates professional

development and educational resources for childcare workers to stress the importance of proper sanitizing procedures in child day care facilities.

Phase II (2002-2003):

Funding, with appropriate accountability, will continue to be used to improve working conditions for staff and to purchase equipment and materials. Additional funding of $946,000 will be directed to:

- the design and implementation of affordable professional training and ongoing professional development for childcare workers; and
- increased financial support to child day care facilities in improving the overall quality of service delivery, and improving the availability and quality of infant care.

Evaluation findings will be available in fall, 2002, and will identify the impact of funding on the working conditions of staff in child day care facilities.

Children's Support Program (Child Witnesses of Family Violence)

The goal of this initiative is to prevent the inter-generational cycle of family violence. Interventions are provided to pre-school children in transition houses in order to support healthy child development, and to support mothers in their parenting role.

Phase I (2001-2002):

Launched on December 12, 2001, this program was designed in partnership with the New Brunswick Coalition of Transition Houses.

Twelve Children's Support Workers have been hired to coordinate a range of services, referrals, and interventions for healthy child development for pre-school children in transition houses throughout the province.

Outreach services can be provided to residents of second-stage housing in Fredericton and Saint John.

Monitoring and evaluation tools have been developed and are now in place.

Phase II (2002-2003):

Funding for this initiative will continue and Children's Support Workers will continue to refine the range of services and interventions offered.

Community Capacity Building for Children and Families (includes Excellence in Parenting Initiative)

The goals of this initiative are to support parents in their primary role of parenting through a range of accessible information and support services, and to support communities in developing strategies for their children and families.

This initiative is comprised of four components to support parents and communities in promoting healthy child development: funding and resource support for community-based initiatives; parent education and support initiatives; a public awareness strategy; and a community engagement strategy.

Phase I (2001-2002):

Working with community agencies, a strategic plan was developed to support community capacity building. In addition, a survey of existing early childhood parenting programs has been undertaken.

Over the year, early childhood social workers were trained in the community engagement process. In addition, promotional activities were developed to reinforce the importance of healthy child development and the role of communities in supporting children and families.

The Born to Read/Le goût de lire program is funded under this initiative, and is an example of an innovative early literacy program that supports parents in their parenting role and promotes early language development. This community-based initiative involves the distribution of a kit (available in both languages) to all parents of newborns throughout the province. The kit contains infant and pre-school children's books and provides information to parents on the benefits of reading and early language development activities. The Born to Read/Le goût de lire program is an example of an effective partnership between community partners and government, with representation from community organizations such as the IODE, Dames-d'Acadie, Conseil d'alphabétisation, the Lieutenant-Governor of New Brunswick, and various government departments.

Funding was also provided to a number of community organizations for new and existing community-based initiatives throughout the province.

Phase II (2002-2003):

Funding for this initiative will continue and additional funding of $300,000 will be directed to:

- financial support for community-based capacity building projects and programs;
- implementation of parent support and education initiatives; and
- implementation of a community engagement strategy involving businesses, communities, parents, service providers, and government sectors.

Enhancements to the Early Childhood Initiatives (ECI) Program

The goal of the Early Childhood Initiatives (ECI) Program is to ensure that children are ready to learn when they enter school. Enhancements have been made to the existing ECI program, and an innovative *Infant-Parent Attachment Pilot Project* is being launched.

Component One focuses on increasing the number of available spaces for early intervention and integrated daycare services and reducing waiting lists for these services.

Component Two is intended to improve accessibility to full-time integrated daycare services for working parents of children with special needs who are participating in the ECI program.

The *Infant Parent Attachment Pilot Project* is designed to identify at-risk parents and help them develop secure attachments with their newborn.

Phase I (2001-2002):

Funding was provided to increase the number of available early intervention and integrated daycare spaces by 275.

Funding was also used to help children with special needs who require a support worker to participate in full-time day care while their parents are working, studying or training. Financial assistance was provided for 40 hours per week (up from 15 hours per week) of full-time integrated daycare services for 50 children with special needs.

On March 31, 2002, there were 1,855 children receiving early intervention services and 543 children receiving integrated day care services.

Launched in December, 2001, the *Infant-Parent Attachment Pilot Project* offers screening and intervention services to parents who are at risk of developing insecure attachments with their infant in the first year of life.

This project is being piloted to families in lower Victoria, Carleton, and western York counties. Early Interventionists have been trained to provide comprehensive and coordinated services to parents and their infant children.

Monitoring and evaluation tools have been developed and are now in place.

Phase II (2002-2003):

Funding for these initiatives will continue and additional funding of $332,000 will be used to increase financial support from $3,000 per space per year to $3,150 per space per year for the purchase of early intervention and integrated day care services for children participating in the Early Childhood Initiatives (ECI) Program.

Early Language Program (ELP) for Pre-School Children

This innovative, community-based initiative is intended to improve early speech and language development in young children. The program is designed to help pre-school children develop the written and spoken communication skills they need to achieve their full potential when they enter school.

Pilot programs in the regions of Saint John, Bathurst and the Acadian Peninsula are designed to help parents and caregivers of pre-school children who have, or are at risk of having speech, language and learning disorders. The results of these pilot projects will inform future decisions on province-wide implementation in subsequent years.

Phase I (2001-2002):

A program design has been developed, and speech language pathologists have been recruited and hired in both pilot regions in preparation for implementation of the program.

Regional ELP teams are in place, with representation from parents and community stakeholders.

A provincial advisory committee has been providing input and guidance into the design of the program and the development of monitoring and evaluation plans. Membership includes

representatives from the Department of Family and Community Services, the Department of Health and Wellness, the Department of Education, Regional Health Authorities, the early intervention sector, and the New Brunswick Association of Speech Language Pathologists and Audiologists.

Phase II (2002-2003):

Funding for this initiative will continue and additional funding of $882,500 will be directed to the continuation of the second year of the pilot projects in the Saint John, Bathurst, and Acadian Peninsula regions. Costs are related to staffing, equipment and program material, promotional material, training, provision of transportation for high-risk families, and evaluation of the pilot projects.

III. Moving Forward

The New Brunswick Government has indicated its support for early childhood development in the recently announced *Greater Opportunity: New Brunswick's Prosperity Plan.* One of the key strategic goals of this plan is "Investing in People", and a cornerstone priority of the action plan for achieving this goal is a "Quality Learning Agenda".

Within this cornerstone, a key priority is a "Quality Start to Education: ensuring children are given the strongest start possible through early childhood development programs such as childcare, prenatal care, and early language development, so they are prepared to learn from the moment they enter school."

In Phase I (2001-2002) of the New Brunswick Early Childhood Development Agenda, a number of enhancements were made to existing early childhood development programs and a number of innovative new initiatives were introduced. In Phase II (2002-2003), we will continue to refine these worthwhile initiatives.

The New Brunswick Early Childhood Development Agenda is our commitment to ensuring greater opportunities for the young children of this province. However, all New Brunswickers must work together to make our Early Childhood Development Agenda a success. Our combined effort will ensure the well-being of our children, our grandchildren, and young people for generations to come.

The following chart offers a quick reference to the new initiatives included in our Early Childhood Development Agenda.

ECD Initiative	Goal	Description	Phase I (2001-2002) Expenditures*	Phase II (2002-2003) Budget
Prenatal Benefit Program	Improved health of pregnant women and their newborns.	Financial assistance and information on healthy food and lifestyle choices for low-income women during pregnancy.	$1.4 M	$ 1.8 M
Enhanced Child Day Care Services	Improved quality of childcare services.	Financial assistance to child day care facilities to improve the availability and quality of child care services. Increased access to affordable professional training and development in early childhood development and childcare.	$ 3.0M	$ 3.946 M
Children's Support Program (Child Witnesses of Family Violence)	Improved child development and prevention of the cycle of family violence.	A range of interventions to pre-school children in transition houses across the province to support healthy child development and support mothers in their parenting role.	$400,000	$ 400,000
Community Capacity Building for Children and Families (includes Excellence in Parenting initiative)	Families and children live in supportive communities. Parents are supported in their parenting role.	Financial assistance and support to enhance the capacity of communities to develop strategies for their young children and families. A range of accessible parent information and support services to support parents in their parenting role.	$650,000	$550,000
Enhancements to the ECI Program • **Early Intervention and Integrated Daycare** • **Infant-Parent Attachment Pilot Project**	Children are ready for school. Infant-parent attachments are secure.	Financial assistance to reduce waiting lists and improve accessibility to early intervention services and integrated day care services. Pilot program offering screening and intervention services to parents who are at risk of developing insecure attachments with their infant children.	$ 1.3M $100,000	$1.632M $40,000
Early Language Program for Pre-School Children	Improved speech and language development.	Community-based pilot program intended to help pre-school children who have speech, language and learning disorders.	$450,000 **$7.3M**	$1.332M **$9.7M**

* *this expenditure data has not yet been finalized*